

Amendments to the Specification

Please replace the paragraph beginning on page 4, line 3, with the following:

Back-plane 26 connects forwarding-planes 24a, 24b and 24c to each other and to control-plane 22. For example, back-plane 26 allows a packet received from network 10a (FIG. 1) at a port 28 on forwarding plane 24a to be routed to network 10b connected to a port 28 on forwarding-plane 24b (e.g., see flow arrow 27). Back-plane 26 also allows central control protocol information to be sent between control-plane 22 and network 10c through ~~forwarding-plane 10c~~ forwarding-plane 24c (e.g., see flow arrow 29a).

Please replace the paragraph beginning on page 11, line 10, with the following:

One concern that arises when discussing offloading of functions to other processors is coordination and communication between the distributed portions of the signaling protocol. Both the signaling protocols and the routing protocols, discussed later, assume that there is some software architecture that manages the distribution. One example is the Distributed Control Plane Architecture for Network Elements discussed in co-pending US Patent Application No. ~~10/XXX,XXX~~ 10/713,237, filed November 13, 2003. While this is one example of such architecture, it provides the functions of peer plug-in discovery, connection establishment, connection maintenance and message passing that allows the control card and any involved line cards to maintain the distribution.